

Interviewed by Kathleen Irving, 23 January 2002

Transcribed by Ellen S. Kiever

This interview took place at Western Living Furniture Store, 1100 West Highway 40 Vernal, Utah.

LaMar Hawkins (LaMar): I'm LaMar Hawkins and I was born and raised in American Fork, Utah. My father died when I was about seven, so my mother kind of worked day and night to keep us together as a family.

Kathleen Irving: How many siblings did you have?

LaMar: Well, my mother was married before and my dad was married before so I really have, as far as immediate family, I've got two brothers and one sister and I've got some half brothers and sisters from previous marriages. And we lived on a little farm down between American Fork and Pleasant Grove down by Utah Lake. We lived in a little log cabin, no lights, and it was just large enough for us to eat in. We slept out in the barn, then we would get up, come in and have breakfast and walk over to a lane where a lot of times we would have to ride a horse to school.

KI: When were you born?

LaMar: I was born in 1926. This would be when I was about seven years, six or seven years, of age, 'cause my dad died when I was nine. We moved after he died. We moved off the farm and moved up in town in American Fork. My mother was taught adult education in sewing so she was a good seamstress. She made dresses for people and taught it in school. I went to work in a bakery when I nine. One day Roy Griffin come over to the house to get my older brother and he wasn't there so Mother said, "Well, I've got another boy here that will go," so I went to work for him when I was nine years of age. I would clean and I learned the bakery business from nine years of age. When I become fourteen, I went out and worked with my brother in Salt Lake at Wonder Bread and then he left during the summer months and I would hitchhike a ride from American Fork to Salt Lake and work in the bakery till the weekends and then come home on weekends and I was only fourteen then. So I was just a youngster. That is where I made my money to go to high school 'cause my mother just didn't have enough money to keep us all together. I worked for Roy Griffin in the bakery all during high school.

KI: So did you attend high school in Salt Lake?

LaMar: In American Fork, 'cause this was in American Fork. I would go from American Fork to Salt Lake and stay at a boarding house during the summer months, come back on weekends, and come back and go to school in American Fork.

I was always a good athlete. I was captain of the football team and basketball team, played baseball and softball, was on the track team and I won the state amateur boxing in AAU in 128 pounds when I was a junior in high school, so that is probably still in the records books

when I was just a junior. Then in 1941 when the war come out, two years later when I was eighteen, I went right into the service. I was in the service for two years, well, about two and one-half years.

KI: What branch?

LaMar: Well, I was in the Seabees, Construction Battalion, and I went from San Francisco to Hawaii. Then when I got to Hawaii ,there was still a lot of war going on and where Pearl Harbor had been bombed and all the ships was still out in the bay there where they had been sunk. Then I went from there to Eniwetok, then we went into a part of the invasion on Saipan and then we went on the invasion to Okinawa. We were in one of the first waves to go in on Okinawa. I was on Okinawa for almost a year and there actually when the war was settled, when they signed the peace treaty on the battleship.

Then I returned, they released you by the length of time that you had been there, and you had so many points and so on, so I got to come home fairly early. I came back to American Fork and at that time I had been working in the service as a baker and I went back to work for Roy Griffin for a while. Then I heard of a bakery out here for sale.

KI: Out here in Vernal?

LaMar: Out here in Vernal. It was a Mr. Evans.

KI: Do your remember what it was called?

LaMar: City Bakery. So I had saved a little money, when I was overseas I never did draw any money off, and by the way, when I went into the service our pay was \$21 a month. Out of that \$21 I made a subsistence to my mother so she got half of my pay, so I got about \$10 a month. Then when I got overseas, you got overseas pay, then I went up pretty good in rank because there were many younger people that was in the bakery. I went up to a 1st Class Petty Officer in the bakery in the service and then I had my mustering out pay, which was \$300 when you got out of the service. So I had saved \$1200 or so which was quite a bit of money back then. I come out and made a down payment on the bakery and bought the City Bakery.

Evans, was the guy that had it, and that was down Vernal Ave. When I first come to Vernal, which was in 1946 or 1947, it was a wide open town. Down where I had the bakery, down south about where the drive-in is for the Zion's Bank right now, down that street there was three or four saloons and they were all wide open for gambling. There was twenty-one [card game] tables, there was blackjack tables, there was crap tables, there was any kind of gambling that you wanted. It was just kind of a wide open town.

KI: Technically illegal, however?

LaMar: It was illegal, but they were able to operate out in this area for some reason. Herb Snyder was sheriff and as long as you didn't have any complaints, he didn't seem to do much. There was fights, it was a pretty rough town when I first come out here.

KI: Do you remember the names of those saloons?

LaMar: There was the Shamrock, which Hunt Watkins had. Across the street there was the Brown Derby, I think at that time the Kemptons had that, and it's where Bud's is now. Then the Brown Derby was up just a little ways from where the drive-in to Zion's is now, just up from where the bakery was, not too far. Then over by where Sam Snyder has his clothing store there was another saloon in there where there was twenty-one, crap tables, gambling and anything that you wanted to do. Then there was a café right by the Bank of Vernal, between Ashton's and the Bank of Vernal. Then there was the Ashton building and then on the other side there was the Cobble Rock Station, and then there was Al Bowden's barbershop, then Collier Furniture Store, then there was something in between it, Hacking Furniture.

KI: Did Collier Furniture Store face Main Street or Vernal Avenue?

LaMar: Faced Vernal Avenue, going down South Vernal Avenue across the street from where the bakery was. Don Hacking had a furniture store there. There was two of them, then Collier was where N.J. Meagher has that building, where they have the sales [approximately 45 South Vernal Avenue]. There is nothing in it right now.

KI: Where that café was? The Mad House Café?

LaMar: Where the café was is where Al Bowden had his barbershop. Then Claudius Banks had the service station, the Cobble Rock Service Station, on the corner. I used to go to work at the bakery at 3:00 in the morning and we had to make everything fresh that day because you didn't have any freezers or things to keep food, so we had to make it fresh every morning. I'd go about 3:00 in the morning and lots of times I'd be there decorating wedding cakes and things till 7, 8, 9, 10 o'clock at night. It was hard work, the bakery was really hard work. I delivered pastries and pies and things to all the cafés around.

KI: Did you have someone working with you?

LaMar: No. Well, I had a couple of girls that worked out of the front, but I did all the baking, at least ninety percent of it, out of the little City Bakery there.

Then I joined the Jaycees and I was just twenty-one, almost twenty-one, when I come to Vernal, and I joined the Jaycees. At that time the Jaycees had the slot machines in Vernal and we had a man running the slot machines. If he had any complaints, he was to settle the complaints even if he had to give them their money back because Herb Snyder, who was the sheriff, said, "As long as you don't have complaints, I am not going to bother you. We get some complaints and we will have to take them out."

Shortly after I was here, they did do away with the gambling, pretty well—the gambling as far as open gambling—in most of the pool halls and the saloons. They still had some poker games in the back rooms. They still had a lot of gambling, but it was not as open as when I first got here. The gambling went on for along time.

We kept the slot machines and the Jaycees was a big organization. Their pledge was that all the profits was to go to recreation in Vernal. We built the swimming pool down where the

courthouse is now, an open-air swimming pool. We bought a new police car for Herb Snyder. We were the ones that basically funded the hospital. We donated \$150,000, I think, to start the hospital. The figures may be a little different, but it is pretty close to that.

KI: I talked to Ken Sowards about this, and he told me that there was a phenomenal amount of money made off those slot machines.

LaMar: We give the hospital, we bought where the Junior High is here, we bought thirteen acres of ground in there and the Jaycees owned it. We bought that to make a recreation area for the community. We were going to have soft ball diamonds, some different recreation things in that area. We found out that we didn't have quite enough ground to do what we wanted to do with it. We never went to merchants and asked for money. We would always put on our own fund raising projects and raise our own money, between that and the slot machines. We had softball games and the people would bring these mules out and we would have softball games where people would pay to watch these games. That is how we made some money on the softball games.

KI: They would bring mules out?

LaMar: They would bring mules out and ride them from base to base. They would hit the ball and get on the mule and ride around the bases. They were sometimes pretty mean, but it was lots of fun for the cowboys to go out and hit that ball and jump on the mule and ride around the bases. In fact, we had one with basketball. It was up to the old high school where they played basketball, and they put rubber cleats on the mules feet and you would have to get the basketball and go put it in the basket. As long as you didn't have the basketball, those mules would be just really good, but the minute you caught the ball, they would throw you a mile in the air. Well those cowboys out of the audience would try to come up and ride them and they *couldn't* ride them. That was our fund raising projects.

We had the Globetrotters out here for basketball; we had the University of Utah freshmen and the BYU freshmen come out and play basketball. We always had projects going. We even build a midget auto racetrack down by the Junior High and put bales of hay around. The guy I worked for, Roy Griffin, was in charge of the midget auto races in Vernal. I got him to bring them out and put on some races in Vernal. We built some bleachers for them. That was another one of our fund raising projects.

Another one of our big fund raising projects was, we had Rex Lane and Gene Fulmer come out and put on a boxing jamboree. In fact, it was down in the old Imperial Hall. We never did go to the merchants and ask for money, we always raised our own. We used to put up all the Christmas decorations, we bought all the decorations. Today the city puts them up. We done so many different things for the community, but there was always thirty to thirty-five people in the Jaycees.

KI: There was an age cap on being a member, wasn't there?

LaMar: I think it was forty or forty-two. I think that was the maximum. Av Kay stayed in till he was fifty. There was Av Kay, Glenn Cooper, myself, Ken Sowards. By the way, we elected him as president of the Jaycees in the state of Utah. Ken Sowards could have probably been the

governor of Utah if he would have ever wanted to run cause he knew every young man in every town in the state of Utah. He probably could have run for any office and made it.

At that time, we had some very good community leaders in our area: Bry Stringham, Hugh Colton, L.Y. Siddoway; that is still alive, Fran Feltch, Chuck Henderson and Lil were probably as good community people as you've ever seen and also Dale Jensen. He was a very active person in our community, very controversial, but he was a very good thinker. Bry Stringham and Hugh Colton were probably as good community leaders as you'll ever see. There were a lot of people that don't believe this, but I really do. I knew them real well. They pretty well elected George Clyde to the governor of Utah. When he was governor, Bry Stringham and Hugh Colton had more say on the state of Utah than anybody that has ever been from Vernal.

One time George Clyde appointed five different people from Vernal, Utah, to be head of departments in the state of Utah. It was Ken Sowards was in charge of Tourism and Publicity. Fran Feltch was in charge of Road Commission. Stu Ashton was the Aeronautical Board. Chuck Henderson was in charge of the Gas and Oil, can't think of the exact name, but it was the one Ken Stringham just, in fact, he appointed Ken Stringham to take his place. I can't think of the other appointment, I'll think of him in a little while, but we had five people appointed from Vernal, Utah, that was head of departments for the state. At that time, if you got one it would great. We had five different appointees at that time.

KI: Would that have been the 1950s?

LaMar: That would probably be the late '50s or early '60s when George W. Clyde was governor of the State of Utah. About that time, Hugh Colton and Bry Stringham were very instrumental in the Central Utah Project. You could probably talk to L.Y. Siddoway and he could give you more information about the water in the state of Utah in the last twenty years than anybody in the state. He was very involved in it and he knows the water. I don't know all the details like he does, but I know that one time all our Green River water was going down to the lower basin states and we had a certain time to either use it or lose it. Hugh Colton, Bry Stringham, recognized this and they are the ones that got the Central Utah Project started. Otherwise, we would not have Flaming Gorge.

See, we were trying very definitely to have at that time Echo Park, over here between the Green River and the Colorado River. There was supposed to be another dam there and then Flaming Gorge and the environmentalists got the one taken out and we weren't able to get the second. We were lucky to get the one we got. Today you probably couldn't get it. If we hadn't gotten that, we wouldn't have the Central Utah Project. They were very instrumental in getting development for the state of Utah.

Back to my life, when I come to Vernal, I married Reba Goss, and we had three lovely children, Rick Hawkins, the sheriff, he went to Utah State and played football; Greg went to Utah State and worked for me for a while and then went to work for the Chamber [of Commerce] and he was the executive director there for five years. Then he left and has been back here running the store. Then my daughter, Marcy, married Mark Stegemeyer, they have their own computer company. They live in Park City. He was a freestyle skier. Back in '75 he took first in the world in freestyle skiing. That is where Marcy met him and she also become a freestyle skier. Then one of their friends got hurt and crippled for life and they both quit skiing like that. He worked here for a while and then they started their own company, a computer company. [She

has] two children, Erin and Sean.

[Erin] is going to Colorado at Boulder, Colorado. Mark has his own company and after the children were out of the home, Marcy decided to become an airline stewardess, so she is flying for Delta Airlines as a stewardess during the week and she is home on the weekends. Mark is gone a lot during the week with his company.

Rick had two boys. They are both living here. Travis works for the Forest Service and Rob works for one of the oil companies here. Greg has four children, three girls and a boy. One is married, one is at Utah State, the younger one is still in high school, and Tim is a senior this year. He's been the golfer for the family. I played a lot of golf and so does Greg. Tim come along and my wife now, Virginia, took him out to the Wasatch front and started him in the little league golfing and he's made the first team all-state now in high school for four years in a row, so he's a very good golfer.

After I was married about twenty years, I divorced, and then two or three years later I married Virginia Garner and she had two children, Melinda, which is secretary to the county attorney, and then Norman, which works in California. Melinda has two children, Amanda and Blake. Amanda's in high school as a sophomore and Blake is still in grade school. Norman is in California and he has a little boy named Bryan. So that is pretty well my history of my family.

Vernal has changed so much. When I come out, I was in the bakery for ten years, then I sold out, well I leased it, to E. J. Duke and then eventually sold it to him. Ralph Preece, Lynn King, and myself went over and started Western Living. We put \$3,000 apiece on \$9,000 dollars and over where Garden Gate Floral is, that used to be a grocery store downtown and they went out of business and we leased that for \$200 a month. We leased that and started a furniture store. Lynn was working for Ashton's at that time and Ralph had the motel and the insurance company. He helped a little bit, but he didn't work there all the time. Me and Lynn pretty well run it. We had one pickup truck. We used to deliver at night after we would sell something. I think our first year we run about \$65,000 which was a lot back in those days. I got a picture up here of the first truckload of appliances ever coming into Vernal, which we bought. They stayed for one year, then I bought both of them out after one year and Lynn stayed and worked for me for a while and then he went back to Ashton's, and then he started his own business, True Value in the old Safeway building. Ralph had the Motel Utah and the Service Insurance Company. I stayed down there for ten years and then I bought this building, located at 1100 West Highway 40.

There was just the front part and the downstairs at the time, then I added one section to the right, facing the building, and then I added the other section on the other part, and then built the back on. I then bought the old Uintah Freightways [trucking] building over here by the post office and that was the warehouse and still is. I started the roller skating rink in it which was a big mistake, worst thing I ever done. It was a good thing for six months, but I started it just about the time the oil boom went down and we were very lucky to even survive through that, most business didn't survive through the oil bust.

The word then was "The last one out of Vernal, turn out the lights." Since then we stayed and struggled and we are back to where we were twelve years ago, before that oil boom went down. We have a real good selection and the store is doing real well and I am semi-retired. That's pretty well. Is there any thing else?

KI: I would like to know about your involvement in any other civic organizations.

LaMar: Oh yes. Well, I didn't mention that. I was president of the Jaycees. I was on the Board of Directors of the Chamber, and was Retail Merchants President.

KI: So you went right from the Jaycees to the Chamber?

LaMar: Yeah, but the Jaycees and the Chamber were really not related. A lot of people thought they were, but they had no relationship at all. I was on both of them at the same time. In fact, I'm a charter member of the Chamber of Commerce. I was probably the youngest member that they had. I think I was just twenty-one when I become a member, just about the time that they started the Chamber. There is only about six or seven charter members left. I don't remember all of them. So, I was in the Chamber, on the Board of Directors. I was Chairman of the Retail Merchants. I was in the Rotary, still in the Rotary. I worked as president of the Men's Golf . I worked in the Little League Baseball.

KI: Did you join the Empire Club?

LaMar: Yes, I was a member and president of that club. In fact, the Empire Club started the golf course.

KI: That's why I wondered.

LaMar: Yes, they started the golf course and then eventually we moved down there.

KI: You sold the golf course?

LaMar: We sold the golf course to the city 'cause there just wasn't enough money for us to keep it going and then eventually, well actually, there was a fire down there, we burned the building down. We got enough money out of the fire to pay our bills and that's just about how it winded up. Then the city built the new facility down there. I was very instrumental in getting the eighteen holes. We had nine holes and I knew Stan Parrish, which was head of the Impact Board in Salt Lake,. He was president of the Chamber of Commerce in Salt Lake and I knew him very well. We were very good friends, went fishing together and done quite a few things, so I helped and worked hard in getting the other nine holes. We've got a nice golf course down here and I hope it improves each year to where we get more play from Salt Lake and different areas. Yeah, I've been in almost every civic organization in the area, president of the Little League. I started, me and Jack Parkinson started, the Little League football in this area. I coached Little League and Pony League both, and I've been in basket ball when it was down at the old Armory, so I've been very active in about everything that has gone on in Vernal.

KI: Do you remember the Knife and Fork Club?

LaMar: Yes, I was a member of the Knife and Fork Club.

KI: I sort of figured you might have been.

LaMar: Years and years ago, yeah, I was a member of that and I enjoyed it. I remember one time that we had a speaker that met everybody at the door. We repeated our name to him and then we went in and sat down. Then he got up and told every one of our names. He could see where we were sitting and he could tell everybody's name in there after we sat down. That was interesting. I really enjoyed it.

KI: Do you think that people relied on each other more for social groups back then in the '40s, '50s and '60s than they do now?

LaMar: I believe the biggest thing we are missing is the younger people today don't realize what makes a community. They have had everything given to them. Not that we don't have real good younger people, we do, but until you've gone through things and fought for things, you really sometimes don't appreciate them. Our younger people today don't realize that. I'm not saying this just because I'm a businessman, but if you can shop at home and pay the same price and be equal in price and have the service, but see a portion of our sales tax stays here. We create jobs and businesses, small businesses especially, is what makes a community. It is nice to have Wal-Mart, but all they do is hire a few people, and every bit of profit they make goes out of town. The local people, their profit stays here. Every civic organization, everything you do, like the high school football, the high school things, they all come to smaller business that keep them, that donate to them. A lot of people don't understand what makes a small community. It is the people, and I think a lot of the younger people don't realize this.

We did when we were in the Jaycees. There was probably thirty-five people that all owned businesses and they were in the Jaycees selfishly to help improve their business and get more business, but they all worked for the community, they all did civic work. It was a real close-knit organization. We worked together, we shopped together, we traded together and today the Jaycees, what ruined the Jaycees is TV. People won't get out now and leave their TVs and go to meetings. We used to go to a meeting two or three times a week on different projects or things we were going to do. They won't go today.

The National Jaycees, state, local and national, I don't think there is any anymore. They are all gone. I notice more and more even the Rotary I belong to now, we don't do a lot physically. Locally we donate money to the library, we'll give some money, 'course we're all getting a little older, but the younger people today are not involved, very few of them, involved in civic things. I noticed my kids, now Greg is very active in the church, but they're not very active in the civic things in our community like we used to be.

KI: I've heard that from several different people that I've interviewed. The same exact sentiment.

LaMar: I don't know why. Well, I do, it's just like anything else. If you've been given things all your life, you don't appreciate them as much as if you had to work for them. We have all spoiled our kids. We've always wanted them to have things that we didn't have and sometimes that is the wrong thing to do. Kids today, if they don't have the right clothes and the right things, the pressures from the other kids is probably hard on them. They have a lot more pressures, I think, in school than we had. So there is a lot of change in things.

We have a lot of wonderful kids, but times are changing, everything is changing. We depend on government, we depend on everything else for our recreation and for different things

where we used to go out and have to make it. Like the Jaycees. When I was in it, we never went out and asked for donations. We went out and raised our own money. They don't do that much any more. I have kids come in here from high school that maybe have earned a trip someplace and rather than go out and earn the money, they go around to the merchants and ask for it. If one of them would come in and say, "I'll work for four hours if I can make some money to go on this trip," why, I would probably donate it to them. But they don't do that, they just want you to donate it to them.

That's the wrong thing. If they would say, "I'm willing to work for four or five hours so I can make some money to go on this trip," most merchants, maybe they would let them work, but then most of them would donate it to them, but to just come in and ask directly, why, I usually, well, if they will for a little while, I'll do anything for them, but they don't do it anymore. That's pretty true, we've made it too easy for younger people today, but then again that's progress and that's life. That's the way we are.

KI: I want to ask about recreational activities that you enjoyed. You told me that you were very athletic when you were in high school. Did you continue to do those kinds of things?

LaMar: Probably the greatest times of my families life. I'm glad you mention this. There is three or four things, one, deer season would roll around we would always take the whole family and go up on the mountain and stay two or three days and hunt deer. Very close, us, Mack Helm, and a group of us would go up and hunt deer.

Pheasant season was another one. When pheasant season rolled around we would always go out and hunt pheasants. I'd go rent some cornfields and we'd hunt pheasants and then come in and have a big breakfast, down to 7-11 maybe, take a little rest, and then go out at night and it was always as a family. Rick and Greg and even Marcy, she had a little .410 and then we had our friends that went with us to.

But probably the greatest time of my life was when we had our ski hill up on the hill. LaRell Anderson built a little ski area up here. He had it rented from the Forest Service, and the first time I went up I think Greg couldn't have been over five, four or five, and Rick was a few years older and Marcy wasn't even big enough to ski yet. They had an old rope tow and we would go up there and ski on the weekend. He had a little tent and he made hamburgers and we could go up there for \$5 and pay for the rope tow and have hamburgers and have just a great outing and it would be my family, Ken Soward's family, Rod Ross's family, the Perrys. There would always be four or five families that would always be up there on that ski hill.

Then he got a little ahead and built a little log cabin up there and a little T-bar that you could go up a little higher. At that time, Marcy, she was old enough to ski. She was about five, so my family started skiing when they was about five and went up on that ski hill. For about \$10, after he got the cabin built, we could have hamburgers and ski and have a really big day on Saturdays, and a lot of times on Sundays, is the only time I got off. I usually worked and Sunday was the only time I would get the chance to get off. I didn't go to church a lot of times. I would go up on the ski hill and took Greg and we would go up skiing. Greg become one of the prettiest skiers in the state. He could go out in the powder. I'll have to tell you a story about him. He gets mad at me when I tell about this.

KI: Well, we won't tell him that you told us.

LaMar: He, Rick, when the Vietnam War, come along he was drafted and went in the war over at Vietnam. Well, at that time, if you wasn't going to college, you were up for the draft. Greg went to college so he was exempt from the draft as long as he was in college. He called me one January and he said, "I think I'll take the next quarter off and ski." Well, I thought he was in school and about a month later I got a draft notice where he was going to be drafted. I called her and told said, "Greg can't be drafted, he's in college." She said, "No, he *was* in college. He's not there this quarter." So Greg had been skiing all quarter and I didn't know it. Well, he got back in school and wasn't drafted. He skied a quarter that I didn't know about.

KI: Tell me about where that hill was?

LaMar: Okay. Do you know where Cart Creek is?

KI: No.

LaMar: Well, as you go up the mountain towards Flaming Gorge, the first creek you come to is Cart Creek, clear up on top, well it was back this way from there and there is a road that cuts off into the trees and back up on the right and there was a big hill up on the side, Grizzly Ridge, and that is where we used to go up and ski. It is too bad that the county can't get it reopened up there to where we could have local people skiing up there. That was the greatest winter sport there is. And there is a lot of snow up there in that area.

KI: What did you like to do in the summer then?

LaMar: Summer we fished. I guess I floated that Green River every weekend. I had a big ten-man Army surplus boat, and we'd float down that river and floated it every summer, Greg. That was another time when all of our family would go up fishin', they floated down the river with us.

End